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**"How the Bible Works Against Sin"  
(Psalm 119:9-16)  
Pastor Peter Yi  
March 12, 2017**

**(Psalm 119:9-16)**

- <sup>9</sup> How can a young person stay on the path of purity?  
By living according to your word.
- <sup>10</sup> I seek you with all my heart;  
do not let me stray from your commands.
- <sup>11</sup> I have hidden your word in my heart  
that I might not sin against you.
- <sup>12</sup> Praise be to you, Lord;  
teach me your decrees.
- <sup>13</sup> With my lips I recount  
all the laws that come from your mouth.
- <sup>14</sup> I rejoice in following your statutes  
as one rejoices in great riches.
- <sup>15</sup> I meditate on your precepts  
and consider your ways.
- <sup>16</sup> I delight in your decrees;  
I will not neglect your word.

**The Need for Purity**

The second section of this psalm addresses a problem and the rest of the section gives us the answer. It's a question for the ages. How can a young person stay on the path of purity? How does a person stay morally clean?

The question that's posed here is for a young person, in particular a young man. If you are a young person you know how important this question is. You know how strong all kinds of temptations are. When we are in our teens and in our twenties our struggles for purity are off the charts. It would be good if we who are older, whose passions may have tempered, not forget how we used to be and remember how intense our struggles were when we were that age. At the same time, this is a question that every parent needs to be aware of, for their children. The 19<sup>th</sup> C British preacher Charles Spurgeon said that since the question is raised for young people whose passions are the strongest, surely it'll apply to all people. So if I address young people directly in this sermon understand that I'm also speaking to all people.

This issue, this question is the most important issue of them all. Why? Because it deals with sin. The greatest need for young people is not that they do well in school. And I think especially for parents we need to get this truth through our thick heads. The greatest need for young people is not that they do well in school. It's not that they'll get good jobs. It's not that they meet good friends. It's not that they get married to a fine man or woman. The greatest need for young people is holiness. The greatest need for young people is that they know what to do with their sin. And if it's the greatest need for young people, then following Spurgeon's comment, it's the greatest need for all people.

So, let's make an immediate application. If you're a young person or the parent of a young person or even the mentor of a young person or you may not be any of those things, but you might know some young people, ask yourself these questions:

1. How do you define success for a young person? Is their holiness a part of your definition of success?
2. How do you pray for your young person? Is their holiness a part of your prayers?
3. How do you parent or teach or advise a young person? Is it for the transformation of their character and growth in their holiness?

Why is this the most important question? For starters the bible makes it the single most important issue for all our lives. Here's one verse that summarizes it all:

...without holiness no one will see the Lord. (**Hebrews 12:14b**)

We may see the inside of fancy cars and fancy restaurants, but without holiness, we will not see the Lord. We may see the inside of luxury condos and palatial homes, but without holiness we will not see the Lord. We may wear the nicest clothing and have great reputations but without holiness we will not see the Lord. Without holiness, without purity no one will see the Lord. We will not see the Lord presently and we may not see the Lord eternally. This is why this question is so important.

Sin, that is, the absence of holiness, is that great enemy that keeps us from God. Listen to this verse from Isaiah 59:2:

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

That's what sin does...it alienates us from God. Sin makes us not even want to go to God and be in a relationship with him. This is why the bible was written. This is why Jesus was sent... in order to deal with this great problem, the problem of sin.

Friends, young people, parents, all of us need to re-prioritize our lists of what is most important. At the top of that list is the Glory of God. Next is the eternal salvation of people. And third is our holiness. The rest is gravy. Young people will you do that? Parents will you do that? The rest of us, will we do that?

That's the question we'll be trying to answer today. How can a young person stay on the path of purity? I'm grateful that the question is stated this way. It says, "the path of purity." What this is implying is a life-long journey. It's also implying there are so many distractions and temptations that can get us off the path.

It's like in Tolkien's book *The Hobbit*. The hobbits are on a journey to slay the dragon and claim the reward and they have to journey through a dark, mysterious forest. And the only advice they are given is to stay on the path, to never take their foot off the path. And as they begin their way through the forest, at first all is well, but slowly their minds become weary, they're hungry, and then they see lights in the distance and the one piece of advice they are told, they cannot keep. They wandered.

Jesus too told us about the path.

<sup>13</sup> "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (**Matt 7:13-14 NIV11-GK**)

Jesus is saying that there are two and only two paths/two gates in life. One leads to life and the other leads to death. The narrow road, the tough road, the road of the Christian, the path of a disciple, is the one that leads to eternal life, but the wide road, the easy road, the road where the masses are headed, leads to hell and destruction.

Every single one of us here, in fact every person on the planet is on one of these two roads. We are living out one of two lifestyles, one of two journeys. Which one are you on? Are you on the path of purity or the path of sin? Are you on the path that leads to life or the path that leads to death? How do we get on and stay on the right road? The rest of these verses answers that question.

**By living according to your word.**

Everyone has a philosophy, a way of life, a wisdom that they live by and they may even share it with others. That philosophy tells us what is important, what is right and wrong. It tells us what our values are. For many people in this room who were raised with religious or Christian values, the danger we fall into is this thing called syncretism. Syncretism is the merging of worldviews. Here are some examples. The mixing of religion and politics where we believe that to be Christian is to be affiliated with a particular party and therefore if a person is affiliated with the other party then he or she must not be a Christian. Or for many of us who are of Asian descent, our culture believes in ancestor worship. So, we may have found a way to be worshipers of God, but at the same time, maintain our veneration for our ancestors. That's syncretism. All Christians have some measure of syncretism where we attempt to merge a non-Christian value with a Christian value. Far too often I think that is one of the most dangerous traps that we fall into. What syncretism often tries to do is merge two incompatible worldviews. This is how we begin compromising and watering down our faith. We do it because we find the Christian way too rigid, or too uncompromising, or too difficult, so we look for an easier way.

Syncretism or compromising will never help us stay on the path of purity, it'll never help us please God and honor him with our whole lives. The right way is live according to the Word of God. Look at the text with me once again. Look at the different ways we are to engage with the Word.

**Here are the things we must do:**

**--by living according to your word** – that means we read the word, we learn the word and then we live out the word. We obey the word. We do what the word of God says.

**--hiding the word in my heart.** One translation says, treasured, another says, stored up. I think the meanings are very similar. We hide away what is valuable. We consider it valuable and precious, so we put it in the place where it would be the most safe and would do the most good...and that's in our hearts. If you're more intellectually bent like I am, then this aspect is really important to consider. I like learning facts about the bible. I like discovering truths and meanings, but I can also get into the habit of allowing my interaction with the word to be more intellectual than spiritual, more about learning than about life changing. That's why it's so important to allow the word to sink deep into our hearts. To do that we need to slow down. We need to take the time the allow God's word to penetrate deep within our hearts.

**--by recounting (replaying, remembering, saying) the word with our lips.**

Once it's in our hearts, we can recount it, we can bring it out again. It's no accident that the psalmist tells us to say it out loud. Sure we can think it, but there's something about saying it verbally with our mouths. Consider how Jesus used the Word in dealing with temptation. When he was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, he didn't merely bring words to his head. What did he do? He spoke the words. He said it so Satan could hear it. When he encountered a man with a demonic spirit, did he just think in his head for the demon to leave the man? No, again he said it. When God created the universe, did he just think it? No he spoke into the nothingness and created the heavens and the earth. Let me give you one more example. Paul tells Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture. He didn't say for everyone to just read it for themselves, quietly in their heads. It was to be read out loud. The pattern of the bible is that we speak to word, to recount the word, to speak it with our lips. When we do that we are telling ourselves what the truth of God is...for our rebuke, for our encouragement, or for our comfort. Let's make that a new habit.

I, personally, have about a dozen or so verses that I go to again and again and again. I learned them when I was a new Christian back when I was in university and over an over I return to these precious truths. One of them is Galatians 2:20. "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, the life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." It has always been my go-to verse in so many different situations. What if we memorized just 3 verses that would help in our fight for purity?

Just as he who called you in holy, be holy in all you do. As it is written be holy because I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16 NIV11-GK)

Or

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7 NIV11-GK)

Or

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; (1 Th 4:3 NIV11-GK)

When we recall the word, we're telling ourselves truth, because every sin is preceded by a lie. We're sticking it to the devil by recalling these words. "Oh ho! You almost got me devil. Now, take that devil!"

**--then the passage mentions us meditating on the word, and consider God's ways.** Look at the progression. We hide the word in our hearts, we recount the word, and now we meditate on the word. To meditate is to consider, to think about, to ruminate, to allow the word to really get deep into us, but also it's an opportunity to interact with God. We can pray back the word to Him. We can thank God for the word. We can more deeply believe in the word. And we can find ways to apply the word and then go and do it.

**--Then finally--by not neglecting the word.**

If we do all these things, do the word, hide the word, recount the word, and meditate on the word, then we would be giving the word of God the attention it deserves.

Those are the things we must do, but, it is not enough that we just follow this as some kind of magic formula and do these things as if they were the 5 simple and irrefutable steps to purity. It requires something deeper than that.

**There are also attitudes toward God and his Word that we must possess as well.**

If we merely focus on the behavioral and not on the attitudes, we will soon fail in doing those behaviors. Attitudes address the heart. Attitudes speak of our motives. It speaks to what I want to do and why I want to do it, more than "what" I should be doing. Does that make sense?

So, the attitudes that this passage brings out are these:

--I seek you with all my heart.

--Praise the Lord

--I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches

--I delight in your decrees

Seeking, praising, rejoicing and delighting are things that reflect the deep desires of our hearts, doesn't it?

Think of when a person is first in love. We can use the same four words to describe that person's attitude and heart. Seeking, praising, rejoicing, and delighting in the one he or she loves. Very, very little effort is required then to do the things we should be doing for that person.

But, now consider a person who is not in love or has fallen out of love. There is no seeking, praising, rejoicing, or delighting. The actions of love are labored and difficult. It'll be done out of obligation only. It'll start taking accounts, seeing if the other person has equally reciprocated or not. It'll turn into bitterness. But when our attitudes are right, in other words, when our heart is right, then the seeking, the praising, the rejoicing, and the delighting are second nature. This is the attitude of the heart we need to possess.

Earlier I said that it wasn't enough to just try and follow these 5 or 6 steps of things to do with the bible. Well, I hate to break it to you, but even this deep attitude of the heart, we cannot do on our own. We can't just decide one day that we're going to change our attitudes toward God and his word. What else is needed?

**The help of God. None of this is possible without the help of God.**

Listen again to the psalmist:

<sup>10</sup> I seek you with all my heart;  
do not let me stray from your commands.  
<sup>12</sup> Praise be to you, Lord;  
teach me your decrees.

He's confessing that unless God prevents me from straying, I'll stray. It's like the song we sang/the words of the hymnal...

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be  
Let that grace now, like a fetter  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it  
Prone to leave the God I love  
Here's my heart, O take and seal it  
Seal it for Thy courts above

Shouldn't that be the prayer for all of us? Are we so strong that we can stay near to God without the help of God?

What about the other verse? "Teach me your decrees." The prayer implies that apart from the Holy Spirit opening my heart and mind and teaching me, I cannot learn. Learning spiritual truths, biblical truths, is nothing short of a supernatural experience because it involves the transformative power of God.

This is the posture we all need to have, a deep and humble reliance upon God to help us in our purity, through his word, by God changing our hearts.

**Conclusion:**

Friends, to be holy is to be a disciple. To grow in holiness is to grow as a disciple. This is what discipleship is. It is learning how to understand, obey, and live out the word of God by the power of God for our holiness and for God's glory. This is what it means to be a Christian.

{Children, I want to explain to you that this is why your parents bring you to church and do devotions with you. They want you to love God and love Jesus. And that's what they are praying for you. And because you love Jesus and Jesus loves you, he's changed your heart from a heart that didn't like obey God into a heart that loves to obey God, so that you would be pure, holy...so that your life would honor and glorify God...so that you would live a life that is blessed and happy in God.}

This is what Jesus did for us. He who knew no sin became sin for us. He, who was the only pure one, took upon himself, our sins, so that we might become pure in the eyes of God. Only through Christ can we be pure and accepted before God.

Let's pray.